

MAATSUYKER ISLAND, Australia's most isolated lighthouse station, is a bleak black rock rising like a whale from the sea off Tasmania's South-West Cape. The world comes to Maatsuyker three times a year — weather permitting — with the arrival of the lighthouse servicing ship. Three families live there: they don't mix much, their relatives think they are mad, but they never want to leave. They say the living is easy on Maatsuyker, far away from traffic jams and politicians.

Roaring 40s hospitality...

By BARRIE WATTS

THE most joyous thing about Maatsuyker Island is getting off it.

Maatsuyker is Australia's most isolated lighthouse station. It lies off the South-West Cape of Tasmania, torn like a paranoiac in the insane latitudes of the Roaring Forties.

Three families live on Maatsuyker only because someone has to look after the lighthouse that warns everyone else to stay away.

Three times a year — weather permitting — the lighthouse servicing ship Cape Pillar brings sustenance, then clears out fast.

Last week the Cape Pillar took Sun photographer Geoff Bull and me along with the returning wives and children of Maatsuyker's two assistant light-keepers.

A storm blew up just when Mrs Clare Visser and her three children were lowered in a basket from the ship to a launch that rose and fell 12ft. in the pitching seas.

Mrs Rosa Edgell and

her three youngsters followed the same way — there were no smiles for the camera — but the rest of us went down the Jacob's ladder, half dead from fright and churning stomachs.

Bleak, black in the mist

Maatsuyker glowered bleak and black out of the thickening mist. Several good waves heaved us ashore and we went up the cliff on a trolley that climbed a 1000ft. wooden railway on a gradient of about two-in-one.

By this time we were wondering why Captain Stan Heriot, of the Cape Pillar, had been so eager for us to sample island hospitality.

And as things turned out we very nearly sampled it for three weeks.

The weather worsened — which hardly seemed possible, but it did — and the ship upped anchor and took off in a tearing hurry for safer waters.

Peter Visser told us he had been a pre-stresser on Hobart's new Tasman Bridge, but he had given it away in favor of the easy life — yes, that's what he said — on Maatsuyker.

And Mrs Visser made an even stranger confession. "I used to be a gay young thing," she said, "gadding about in black stockings to art shows and concerts, and doing the nightclubs and holding earnest conversations about life.

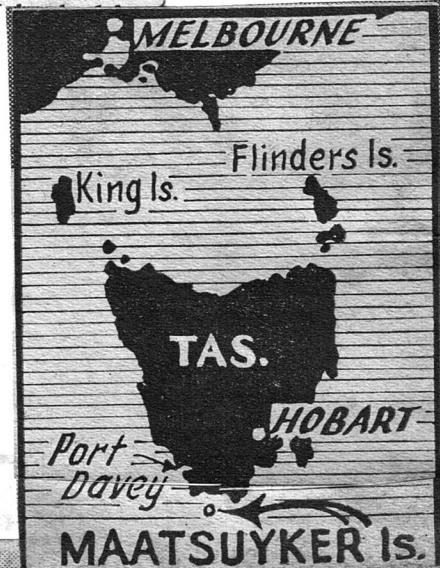
"But I wouldn't swap Maatsuyker for anything. My relatives think I'm quite mad, but I'm a much more serene person now — I live life instead of talking about it."

The Vissers have been on the island two and a half years — Clare was taken off in a fishing boat to give birth to her youngest, Dirk, two, in Hobart — and they reckon they don't ever want to leave.

Head keeper Frank Armstrong and his wife, Violet, have two children on the island with them — James, six, and Gaye, four — their

eldest child, Roseanne, eight, is away at school at Cygnet, in the Huon Valley.

"That's the only catch," Frank said. "The kids eventually have to go to school — young James is doing pretty well with correspondence lessons so far, but it gets a bit difficult at times."



ROUGH SEAS and the razor-back coastline of Maatsuyker Island form a forbidding picture as the launch crew return to the waiting lighthouse service ship, Cape Pillar, after bringing The Sun reporter and photographer ashore. The Cape Pillar is the island's only real contact with Australia. It calls three times a year — weather permitting — to unload provisions.

Mrs Rosa Edgell (left), wife of one of the lighthouse keepers, and her daughter ride the railway with regional lighthouse inspector, Mr Charles Conway.



Going home by basket



MRS CLAPE VISSER, with her children, Helen, 4, Emenda, 3, and Dirk, 2, is hoisted in a basket to her lonely home — the lighthouse on Maatsuyker. She and her family were returning after six weeks in Hobart.



 A MAATSUYKER family — and their keeper, the lighthouse. Mrs Violet Armstrong, wife of the head lighthouse keeper, walks on the windswept island with her children, James, 6, and Gaye, 4. Another daughter, Roseanne, 8, is at school at Cygnet, in the Huon Valley.



BLEAK Maatsuyker Island off Tasmania's South-West Cape.  The cliff-side railway (arrowed) is used to hoist people and provisions. The lighthouse is on the other side of the island.



 HEAD LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER Frank Armstrong tends the light — a kerosine mantle type. Home life is the most important thing with this job, he says. Children absorb all their interest and it is a big disappointment when they have to leave the island for schooling in Tasmania.